

The Voter's Education Project

(Case Study)

The service focus for the South End team this summer was voter education. This team consisted of 18 members and a Youth Opportunity staff person. The Youth Opportunity team that was assigned to work in this community quickly found out about the startling need for voter's education and awareness amongst many local residents. They learned first hand that a high percentage of people didn't vote in this community. Therefore, their voices weren't being heard on issues that were impacting them.

It wasn't until after conducting various conversations with several neighborhood partners that the team decided to use this opportunity as a way to strategically engage the community around something that was current and relevant to the community overall.

The first phase of this project was to access relevant materials and information to be able to properly inform the community about the importance of voter's registration. The team was then divided into 3 committees that had specific roles to make the project happen. The following committees were: the outreach committee, planning committee, and the documentation committee.

Each of these groups served a vital role for the team. The planning committee was able to leverage City Hall by accessing materials, information, and training on how to fill out a voter's registration form. They were also responsible for training other members on the team with the information.

Once this phase was complete, the Outreach committee developed a plan on how to canvas the whole community by targeting certain areas. The 3 major areas targeted were locations where low voter turnout was significant to the community. These areas were El Centro, Villa Victoria Housing development, and Cathedral housing development. Two of the three areas are low income housing developments and the other is a program that offers alternative educational services to minority adults and youths.

Although the members were excited, motivated and empowered by the idea of increasing awareness around voter's education, the team learned quickly how hard it was to engage people with important information. Some people were rude, unresponsive, or simply not interested in the materials that were being offered. The other challenges that were identified had to do with the times of the day they went out to engage people and the locations that the members were targeting. They also felt that leveraging community events, festivals, and weekends could have been a more effective strategy than the one they initially used.

The team realized that although they were only able to register 50 people to vote, the lesson that they learned from the process was more significant. They learned about the importance of ownership over a project and its completion, the knowledge of the voter's registration process, and through out this experience they learned about the empowerment that can come from a team working together with a shared vision.